

ROBERT HENRY WOLCOTT

BY MYRON H. SWENK

Dr. Robert Henry Wolcott was born at Alton, Illinois, on October 11, 1868. His father was Robert N. Wolcott and his mother Agnes (Swain) Wolcott. It was in the neighborhood of Grand Rapids, Michigan, however, that as a boy Wolcott pursued his earliest interests in biology. His first publication, dealing with bird observations in the vicinity of Grand Rapids, was published in the *Ornithologist and Oölogist* in 1884, when he was a sixteen-year-old student in the Grand Rapids High School, from which he graduated in 1885. Soon after this graduation young Wolcott entered the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor, where he received the Bachelor of Law degree in 1890, the Bachelor of Science degree in 1892, and the degree of Doctor of Medicine in 1893. As a young man in the University, Wolcott found numerous opportunities for biological field work in the vicinity of Ann Arbor. During these years he associated considerably with that group of Michigan bird students that organized the Michigan Ornithological Club in 1895. After the organization of this club, Dr. Wolcott contributed articles, dealing with the nesting of different species of Michigan birds, to the *Bulletin of the Michigan Ornithological Club*.

Instead of engaging in the practice of law or medicine, upon the receipt of his B. L. and M. D. degrees from the University of Michigan, Dr. Wolcott engaged as a member of a party making a biological survey of the waters of the state of Michigan, with special reference to the fish supply, during the summer of 1893. He continued this work during the summer of 1894, in which year he received a call to continue graduate study and act as an assistant in the Department of Zoology at the University of Nebraska, which appointment he accepted. His work in Nebraska ornithology began, therefore, in the fall of 1894, and continued over a period of forty years until his death at Lincoln on January 23, 1934. On June 2, 1897, Dr. Wolcott was married to Miss Clara Buckstaff of Lincoln, who, with a brother, son, and daughter, survives him.

Four years after his removal from Michigan to Nebraska, in 1899, while Dr. Wolcott was holding the position of Adjunct Professor in the Department of Zoology, and with the successful organization of the Michigan Ornithological Club fresh in mind, he coöperated with Professor Lawrence Bruner, then Chairman of the Department of Entomology and Ornithology at the University, in the organization of a Nebraska Ornithological Club at Lincoln. It so happened that at almost exactly the same time, but quite independently, there was also a

Nebraska Ornithologists' Association organized at Omaha. A combination of these two organizations in the summer of 1899 resulted in the establishment of the Nebraska Ornithologists' Union, which held its first annual meeting at Lincoln on the following December 16. Dr. Woleott was the first Recording Secretary of the new state organization. He retained that office by successive re-elections during the years 1900-01 to 1903-04, and the first three volumes of the *Proceedings of the Nebraska Ornithologists' Union* were brought out under his editorship in 1900, 1901, and 1902, respectively. At the close of his fifth year as Secretary, Dr. Woleott retired from that office in order to accept the office of President of the organization, on January 30, 1904. Subsequently he was three times re-elected to this office, in 1916, 1923, and 1924.

Dr. Woleott's first papers on Nebraska birds included one published in the *Bulletin of the Michigan Ornithological Club* in 1899, dealing with birds noted in Nebraska in the fall and winter of 1898-99, and others in the *Proceedings of the Nebraska Ornithologists' Union* in the years immediately following the establishment of the latter organization. In 1899, Dr. Woleott returned to Grand Rapids for a summer of field work, varied with a month spent in similar work at Batavia, Illinois. In 1900, he spent the early summer in the field at Woods Hole, Massachusetts, and August of that year at Indiantown Island, Maine. During these two summers a great portion of his attention was devoted to the birds, as extensive ornithological notes during this period from the several localities just mentioned testify.

The year after his arrival in Nebraska, Dr. Woleott was made an instructor in the Department of Zoology at the University of Nebraska, and received the degree of Master of Arts at that institution. Three years later (1898) he was promoted to be Adjunct Professor of Zoology. In 1902, he became Assistant Professor of Zoology and Demonstrator in Anatomy, and the following year was again promoted, to be Associate Professor of Zoology, in charge of the Anatomy Laboratory. Two years later (1905) he was given the rank of a full professor, with the title of Professor of Anatomy. It was he, largely, who developed the pre-medical work in the University of Nebraska, then under the administration of the Zoology Department. In 1909, Dr. Woleott was made Chairman of the Department of Zoology and acting Dean of the College of Medicine. When a permanent location for the College of Medicine of the University was to be chosen, Dr. Woleott selected Omaha, but he himself chose to stay at the main University in Lincoln, as Dean of the Junior Medical College there, and to con-



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tinue his administration of the Department of Zoology. In 1915 he severed official connection with the College of Medicine, and assumed the more restricted duties of Professor of Zoology and Chairman of the Department, which remained his status until his death.

Dr. Wolcott's interest in living things was not confined to the field of ornithology. He was keenly interested in entomology as a boy and young man in Michigan, and continued that interest during his residence in Nebraska. His particular interests lay with the butterflies, moths, and beetles. At the time of his death he left an incomplete treatise on the butterflies of Nebraska, and a similar account of the tiger-beetles and other families of beetles as represented in that state. His most serious interest, however, was in the family of American water mites, in which group he became, through researches carried on at Nebraska during the decade beginning about 1898, the generally regarded American authority. In 1905, he published a synopsis of the genera of water mites, this paper following revisions of the North American species of several of the genera of the group. During the last few years of his life he devoted a great deal of labor to a textbook in beginning zoology, which was published under the title *Animal Biology* only a short time before the onset of his fatal illness. Dr. Wolcott was one of the co-authors of the *Preliminary Review of the Birds of Nebraska*, published in 1904, and author of *An Analysis of Nebraska's Bird Fauna*, published in 1909, his two most important contributions to ornithology.

For almost the whole of his very active life, Dr. Wolcott was in splendid health, due in part, no doubt, to his love of the out-of-doors, to which he resorted at every opportunity. He was an enthusiastic sportsman, and was elected an honorary member of the Lincoln chapter of the Izaak Walton League. Through his summer teaching work, he was able to broaden his field experiences in different parts of the United States. In the summers of 1901, 1904, 1905, 1907, 1924, and 1925, he was in charge of the biology courses at the University of Missouri, at Columbia. In the summers of 1923, 1926, and subsequently, he carried on similar work at the Puget Sound Biological Station in Washington state. He joined the American Ornithologists' Union in 1901 and in 1903 was elected a member of that organization. In 1924 he became an active member of the Wilson Ornithological Club and remained so up to the time of his death. In 1909, he was invited to represent Nebraska in the Advisory Council of *Bird-Lore*. He was a Fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, and a member of the American Society of Zoologists.

American Society of Naturalists, American Microscopical Society, Ecological Society of America, Entomological Society of America, Nebraska Academy of Science, and an honorary member of the Michigan Academy of Science, in addition to those societies mentioned above. He belonged also to the Society of the Sigma Xi, Phi Delta Theta fraternity, and the American Association of University Professors. He was a thirty-third degree Scottish Rite Mason, and his burial in Wyuka Cemetery in Lincoln, on January 25, was in charge of Lincoln Lodge No. 19, A. F. & A. M.

UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA.

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BIRDS AT A RAIN-POOL IN MASSACHUSETTS IN OCTOBER, 1933

BY SAMUEL A. ELIOT, JR.

Readers of the WILSON BULLETIN may be interested to imagine the Connecticut Valley of New England as a miniature Mississippi Valley—a north-south trough (a natural migration route) with high ranges on the west and lower hills on the east. But the average mid-western bird-student might be surprised that although it is so near the ocean, this minor inland river-system, with all its ponds and swamps, lacks or almost lacks a number of water birds. Just because the sea is within rather easy flying-distance, sea-loving birds are hardly more than accidental in the middle section of the Valley (that which crosses Massachusetts), and most shore birds are rare. Among our “accidentals” may be named the Red-throated Loon, Leach’s Petrel, Gannet, Barrow’s Golden-eye, Surf Scoter, Ruddy Turnstone, Hudsonian Curlew, Knot, Purple Sandpiper, Red Phalarope, Great Black-backed Gull, Laughing Gull, Common Tern, and Dovekie. Among water birds which are now and then recorded, not by accident but as transients in very small numbers, we list the Double-crested Cormorant, American Brant, Snow Goose (probably Greater), Gadwall, Shoveller, Redhead, Canvas-back, Old-squaw, White-winged Scoter, Ruddy Duck, Red-breasted Merganser, Golden Plover, Black-bellied Plover, Willet (probably Western), Red-backed Sandpiper, Dowitcher (subsp.?), Sanderling, Northern Phalarope, Black Tern, and Brünnich’s Murre. At the seashore, a hundred miles away, most of these are regular and some are abundant. Many of them are far more common in the middle of